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Security Council

Seventy-first year

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Wednesday, 30 November 2016, 11.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Seck	(Senegal)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Geneva; Mr. O'Brien is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from London; and Mr. Cappelaere is joining today's meeting via videoteleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura (*spoke in French*): I thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity.

(*spoke in English*)

As members are aware, I will be briefing the Council in a few days, on 8 December. On that occasion, I will be able to elaborate more on the overall political process in Syria, which needs to maintain its momentum because, as we have always said, we cannot simply let the facts on the ground take place; we also need to constantly maintain a political momentum.

Today, however, let us focus on the immediate crisis in Aleppo. As the Council is aware and as has already been indicated, my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, and my colleague UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere will elaborate further on the humanitarian tragedy and the United Nations response, particularly and specifically with respect to Aleppo. So, on my side, at least at this stage, I am of course available for questions on a few points, because the real floor belongs to those who are handling and want to handle the humanitarian aspect.

Over the past two weeks, both ground and air assaults on eastern Aleppo and also, frankly, attacks on western Aleppo have intensified, culminating in the capture last weekend by Government forces of several districts in the northern part of eastern Aleppo, thereby de facto splitting the largest opposition-held urban stronghold into two sides. It is estimated that almost 40 per cent of the area previously held by armed opposition groups is now in the hands of Government forces.

Over the past few days, thousands of civilians have fled from eastern Aleppo neighbourhoods to other parts of the city, and initial reports indicated that up to 16,000 people are being displaced; in fact, the figure is growing by the hour, as the Council will be hearing from Stephen O'Brien. It is likely that thousands more will flee should the fighting continue to spread and further intensify over the coming days. I have therefore strongly suggested — and I have been informed that that has now been agreed upon by the Government — that Ali Al-Za'tari, our Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator in Damascus, together with as many members as possible of the United Nations international country team, should go to Aleppo as soon as possible in order to rejoin our many colleagues who are nationals and have already started to work from within the country team in order to assist the Syrian civilian population in Aleppo, both eastern and western.

Violence in Aleppo is not one-sided, let us be frank. Even if attacks on western Aleppo are not on the same scale, we have recently seen attacks from eastern Aleppo on residential quarters there, including the shelling of a school on 20 November in which reportedly 10 children died and many more were injured. Yesterday Stephen O'Brien — we were together in Brussels — reported that up to 25,000 people had been displaced in western Aleppo over the past few weeks. The Council will hear further updates again; as can be seen, the figure is increasing.

Even as we focus on Aleppo today, we should remember that the war continues in Idlib, Hama, Al-Waer, Homs, north of Latakia, western Ghouta, north-western Damascus and eastern Ghouta. Each of those areas deserves a separate description, but the

underlying theme remains the same: the continued dominance of a military over a political strategy, and the brutal price paid by civilians in that process.

Tens of thousands still remain in opposition-controlled areas in Aleppo, and they are living under constant threat resulting from the ongoing fighting. Others are at risk while attempting to flee the fighting, adding to the dangers associated with attempting to flee across an active front line. We have received reliable reports indicating that, in many cases, opposition groups have been actually preventing civilians from leaving areas under their control. We are also concerned that, upon reaching Government-controlled areas or those controlled by the Syrian defence forces, civilians perceived to have lived in opposition-controlled areas or to have connections with armed opposition groups may have been detained. Tens of thousands of civilians on all sides are therefore in need of aid.

The United Nations should be able to access those in need, wherever they are, by all means or routes possible, and without preconditions. In short, aid needs to be delivered to those inside and outside Aleppo, and those who have left must be protected from retribution. Our line will unavoidably be — as it has always been the case in the past in other difficult situations — that the United Nations and its partners should be allowed and should be ready to reach all sides of eastern Aleppo with urgent humanitarian aid. That is the principle. If, subsequently, implementing that measure is not immediately possible in a comprehensive and effective manner, the United Nations should nevertheless not hesitate to try to help all those whom it can reach today, in view of the current circumstances. The priority is reaching people, those we have been concerned and worried about and who have been isolated from humanitarian aid since June.

When I met Foreign Minister Al-Moualem in Damascus on 20 November, I addressed the issue of aerial attacks on hospitals in eastern Aleppo, which the Secretary-General himself condemned on the same day. I publicly suggested that a verification mission be sent to eastern and western Aleppo to assess damage on the hospitals, which is also a suggestion that, I think, our Humanitarian Coordinator in Damascus has been making. I reiterate that call in the Council today.

You will recall, Mr. President, that last month, since there were no other plans going forward that could stop the violence from continuing, I proposed a political initiative for Aleppo, not really a humanitarian one, but a comprehensive one that is separate from humanitarian proposals. It requires an end to the violence, the departure of Al-Nusra Front fighters from eastern Aleppo and the preservation of the local administration — not a separation, not an autonomy, not a new type of administration, but the preservation of the local administration. That would be guaranteed by those with the power to give such a guarantee. That proposal, in one form or another, has actually been discussed now for at least six weeks in Lausanne in follow-up meetings of some of the participants of the original Lausanne meeting and in other discussions.

I myself have continued to push those ideas, including most recently during my visit to Damascus and through contacts with the opposition and armed opposition groups. That proposal is still on the table, and is particularly applicable to that part of eastern Aleppo that is still under the control of the armed opposition with a clear presence of Al-Nusra in it. While the situation on the ground is fast evolving, that proposal has become less obviously applicable immediately, but a part of it, the departure of Al-Nusra, the actual stopping of the bombing, the humanitarian access and the preservation — I repeat — of the local administration is still on the table.

I am convinced that helping to ensure the departure of those fighters whom the Council considers to be terrorists, the Al-Nusra, and who to this day remain in parts of eastern Aleppo still controlled by the opposition, should be and could be an outcome around which everyone in Syria and the international community could still agree. I therefore urge concerned stakeholders not to lose their focus on that practical initiative, which is still valid, particularly at this very delicate moment when the forecast could be that the fighting in eastern Aleppo may continue for weeks with a lot of collateral, tragic effects. That may also spare innocent civilian lives and ensure the separation of terrorist elements from other armed groups.

As I said, I will be brief, and as I said, there is plenty of evidence that the military logic is currently prevailing on both sides. The Council, on behalf of the international community, should call on all belligerents and their sponsors to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in Aleppo. But make no mistake about the fact that none of the military developments that we are witnessing point to what one could call a stable ongoing,

permanent military solution. Indeed, any sustainable solution to the Syrian tragedy, when it comes, will have to include a formula for the stability of the country in order to ensure the non-recurrence of the terrorist threat and the return to what could be a stable Syria. It is my strong conviction that such a formula cannot be brought about without a negotiated political settlement to the crisis, one that involves a mechanism for sharing power and implementing the agenda set forth in Council resolution 2254 (2015). I look forward, therefore, to briefing Council members in person next week, on 8 December, in order to speak in further detail of the options that may and should exist in order to continue pushing towards the attainment of a political process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I am joining the Security Council from the offices of the International Maritime Organization in London, and I would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing, whose contents coincide with those contained in our presentation to the European Parliament yesterday.

For over five years now, the United Nations and the entire humanitarian community have raised the alarm about the devastating impact of the conflict in Syria on millions of ordinary men, women and children. We have pleaded that the Security Council and the international community come together to ensure that both civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected in accordance with basic humanitarian and international obligations, that access be granted to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance and that all efforts be made to reach a political solution to the conflict. Our calls, and the requests, even the demands, of the Council have largely gone ignored.

The parties to the conflict in Syria have shown, time and again, that they are willing to take any action or do any deed to secure military advantage, even if it means killing, maiming or besieging civilians into submission in the process. There are no limits or red lines left to cross. The rules of war — sacrosanct notions born out of generations of costly and painful lessons and established more than 150 years ago, in 1864 to be precise, in the First Geneva Convention — have been systematically disregarded in Syria.

Nowhere has the cruelty of this war been more grimly witnessed than in Aleppo. Aleppo, one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities and Syria's manufacturing capital, has been recklessly destroyed over the course of the past five years. We have all seen the harrowing images of bombs and mortars raining down in recent days, weeks and months on civilian areas, residential houses, schools, medical facilities, water and electric stations, and public markets. There are constant, tormenting images of people murdered, bloody, and exhausted. There is constant bombing and shelling in plain sight, occurring night and day — day in and day out. The noose of the siege has tightened, and those civilians trapped are in desperate conditions. Those attacks have not been limited to eastern Aleppo but have also killed and injured civilians in western Aleppo and damaged civilian infrastructure. As the Council has heard me say before, Aleppo has become the apex of what has become a catalogue of horrors in Syria. Its people have been living in a long terrifying nightmare-reality that no human being should have to endure.

The intensity of attacks on eastern Aleppo neighbourhoods over the past few days has forced thousands of civilians to flee to other parts of the city. In the past four days, numerous civilians have reportedly been killed. Just today, we received a report that scores of people were killed in a single air strike this morning. It is estimated that up to 25,000 people have been displaced from their homes in eastern Aleppo since Saturday. That is the estimate that Staffan de Mistura has just given, and I do not have any further information other than that which were able to get at approximately the same time yesterday. We will keep the Council updated. That number includes approximately 13,500 people 60 to 70 per cent of whom are women and children in a collective centre and cotton factory in Jibreen, a Government-held area to the east of eastern Aleppo city; 500 with family members in western Aleppo; 8,500 in collective shelters in Sheikh Maqsoud, a Kurdish enclave north of eastern Aleppo city; as well as tens of thousands displaced within eastern Aleppo itself.

As the fighting continues unabated, the situation is fluid and those statistics are indeed changing by the hour and the day. It is likely that thousands more will flee should fighting further spread and intensify over the coming days. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and local humanitarian partners supported

by the United Nations are responding to the needs of internally displaced families in Jibreen, Sheikh Maqsoud and elsewhere. That includes preparing hot meals and bread to families, ensuring medical assistance to the sick and injured, providing potable water and distributing sanitation and hygiene kits, and other basic relief items such as blankets and mattresses.

The United Nations has prepositioned stocks to support the response including non-food items for 45,000 people; water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition supplies for 80,000 people; and food for 150,000 people. Those stocks can be replenished within 48 hours from the United Nations hub in Homs and elsewhere as necessary. It is therefore absolutely vital that the Government of Syria enable us to deploy in safety and without undue restrictions all essential international and national staff to Aleppo to increase our capacity to respond effectively to those growing needs and address protection concerns for civilians.

We must recognize that, even though some people have been able to flee the fighting, many have gone from one terrifying situation to what they consider to be another. Aside from the dangers associated with attempting to flee across active front lines, we have received reports that non-State armed groups are preventing civilians from leaving areas under their control. There are also deep protection concerns that upon reaching Government-controlled areas, civilians perceived to have links or connections with non-State armed groups, including humanitarian workers, potentially face arbitrary arrests, detention or worse. Trapped in Aleppo are also dozens of humanitarian staff who have heroically assisted civilians and are now also losing their lives. According to the World Health Organization, three members of the health staff were killed adding to the many other Syrian doctors, health workers and civilians.

As we have seen before, across Syria and throughout the conflict, men, women and children have been routinely arrested at Government-controlled checkpoints before being transferred to one of dozens of official or secret Government-run detention facilities. They are often held incommunicado and indefinitely while facing the risk of being subjected to torture and ill-treatment, extrajudicial killings or being disappeared.

I call on all parties to the conflict to adhere to and respect international humanitarian law. I remind all parties to the conflict that civilians and those hors de combat must be respected and protected at all times. Any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary, and to a place of their choosing. Parties must allow humanitarian organizations safe and unimpeded access to bring life-saving help to those displaced and identify and respond to protection threats. And finally, it is imperative that all those displaced are allowed to return voluntarily and in safety and dignity to their homes as soon as the situation allows.

I am extremely concerned about the fate of the remaining civilians in the besieged areas of eastern Aleppo city. These people have been besieged for nearly 150 days now and most, simply, do not have the means to survive for much longer. Intensified fighting and aerial bombardment continues to occur resulting in civilian casualties and injuries. As of today, as a result of the bombardment and shelling, all hospitals have been directly hit several times, and there is no properly functioning hospital in eastern Aleppo city except for one trauma unit. All other primary medical facilities are operating at minimum capacity and do not have trauma-treatment capabilities, leaving most wounded civilians unable to get the most basic treatment. With few, if any, ambulances available, we are receiving reports of wounded civilians being rushed to medical facilities on vegetable carriages. Access to clean water is scarce. People have resorted to scavenging as United Nations humanitarian food stocks have been exhausted while prices of scarce basic food and fuel supplies have dramatically risen to levels that most remaining civilians are unable to afford. People are trapped and terrified. They are running out of time.

Just as we are ready to respond to all those displaced, the United Nations and its partners also remain ready to provide immediate assistance and medical evacuations for civilians inside besieged parts of eastern Aleppo in line with the United Nations humanitarian four-point plan that we have been seeking to implement since early November. Furthermore, truckloads of humanitarian supplies stand ready to deliver humanitarian assistance to eastern Aleppo from Turkey and western Aleppo. For the sake of humanity, we call on and plead with the parties and those with influence to do everything in their power to protect civilians and enable access to the besieged part of eastern Aleppo before it becomes one giant graveyard.

Indiscriminate shelling also hits civilian-populated areas of western Aleppo, killing and injuring civilians. Civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical

facilities, has also been destroyed, as I reported to the Council last week (see S/PV.7817). Since July, approximately 70,000 people have been displaced within western Aleppo as a result of fighting and indiscriminate shelling. Overall, the United Nations estimates that up to 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) now live in western Aleppo. The United Nations, SARC and partners continue to respond to the needs of pre-existing IDPs in western Aleppo, as well as the wave of new displacement from eastern Aleppo in recent days.

While the world is watching events in Aleppo, another 700,000 people are in other besieged areas across the country, mostly in rural Damascus surrounded by Government forces. As winter approaches, they are trapped and petrified, and as they watch the chilling events in Aleppo unfold, they are asking: Will I be next? It may be too late for many of the people of eastern Aleppo, but surely the Council can come together, stop the brutality and also prevent that a similar fate does not befall other Syrians. What they and we need to see above all is three things: first, real respect and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure; secondly, safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access; and thirdly, an end to brutal sieges for once and for all.

These are neither new nor complicated demands, but common threads of humankind that we all have a responsibility to rally around. And those parties that cannot or will not live up to their basic obligations should know that they will one day be held accountable for their actions. I should add that in all my points of advocacy for the suffering people caught up in this crisis, the overwhelming question that comes to me from politicians, the affected people and journalists is: "Why on Earth can the Security Council not come together and unite to put a stop to this suffering?"

The people of Syria have suffered far too much and for far too long. United Nations humanitarian agencies, SARC and our non-governmental organization partners are doing everything they can to meet those needs. But, as we have repeatedly said, the solution to this crisis does not rest with us. More than anything, I urge all Council members for a political solution so that we can give some semblance of hope to the many millions of Syrian families who will in fact fail to be able to go to sleep tonight, but they will be hungry and they will be sick and they will be fearing for their lives.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Cappelaere.

Mr. Cappelaere: I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Security Council today on the plight of children in Syria. To say that their situation is tragic would be an understatement. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what words could still adequately convey the unspeakable horrors endured by Syria's children every day. Tens of thousands of children have already been killed. Millions have been uprooted from their homes, some more than once. Too many have been deprived of basic medical care and safe drinking water. Too many have witnessed the deaths of their loved ones and the destruction of the places they once thought are safe: their homes, their schools, their playgrounds and their hospitals. Simply put, Syria's children are trapped in a living nightmare. We must ask ourselves: What is left of childhood for the boys and girls of Syria?

We have just heard from my colleague, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, about how devastating the past few days have been for the people of Aleppo. As we consider the events unfolding there, I would like us all to pause for a moment and imagine life through the eyes of a child who is trapped in that tragic situation. As a boy or girl in Aleppo today, where do you find comfort and hope amid the bombs? Determined to learn, you attend school whenever your parents allow you to leave the house, but you do not know any more if you will ever come back. It is hard for you as a child to focus because it is cold and you do not sleep well, haunted by nightmares and hunger. Children are wondering why this is happening. Children are wondering why no one is doing more to make this stop.

Amir, a five-year-old boy, is one of those children. Our team met him in Aleppo very recently. He and his sister were playing outside when their house was shelled. His sister was injured in the face and eye, while Amir sustained severe burns all over his body. He had to undergo two painful surgeries to replace the burned skin in one of the very few remaining health facilities in Aleppo. Harsh as it may sound, Amir was lucky. Too many children today are not as lucky.

In western Aleppo, we met a father living with the trauma and deep regret of simply letting his eight and ten-year-old daughters go to school. They left their makeshift home one morning with their schoolbags on their back. Only their lifeless bodies returned after a

shell slammed into their classroom. UNICEF colleagues could barely look into the eyes of the father suffering so much pain.

As the Council heard last week, the health system in eastern Aleppo is crumbling. Doctors on the ground told UNICEF that children with poor chances of survival are often simply left to die due to limited capacity and supplies.

The violence must stop. Nothing justifies the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, especially children. Parties to the conflict must protect civilians, not least children, and allow immediate access for humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving assistance. UNICEF, together with its partners, have been standing and continue to stand ready to respond immediately as soon as a humanitarian pause is agreed.

Beyond the grim situation in Aleppo, we estimate that some 6 million children inside Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. Over 2 million of these children are living in hard-to-reach areas, which humanitarian agencies cannot access on a regular basis. Nearly half a million children live under siege, cut off from humanitarian aid and basic services for months at a time. Some of these children have been living under siege for two years. UNICEF and partners strive on a daily basis to deliver timely and quality assistance to the most vulnerable children throughout Syria. Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all humanitarians working courageously on the front lines for Syrian children.

When we have access, we can achieve a great deal. During the month of October alone, UNICEF and its partners reached 2.9 million Syrians with urgently needed assistance, including nearly 350,000 in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Since January, over 3 million children under five have been vaccinated through polio campaigns. Back-to-learning supplies have reached nearly 3 million children. Urgent maintenance to water and sanitation systems have allowed millions to access safe water. And essential nutrition supplies have reached nearly 300,000 children in besieged and hard-to-reach areas through inter-agency convoys. Working together with our partners, we can and have made life just a little more bearable for Syrian children. Sadly, however, we often fail — not due to a lack of commitment or a lack of readiness. As those children wait for us, they wonder why.

Schools have come under relentless attack all over the country. This year has been particularly devastating for education. Since the beginning of 2016, the United Nations has documented 84 attacks on schools across Syria, with at least 69 children losing their lives and many more injured. Across the country, more than 7,000 schools can no longer be used because they are either destroyed, damaged, are sheltering displaced families or are being used for military purposes. Today, 1.7 million children in Syria are out of school.

In the worst areas, safe water is either scarce or too costly. In collective shelters or households hosting displaced families, toilets have to be shared by dozens of people and sanitary conditions are extremely poor. Only one-third of Syria's sewage is now being treated. The violence has destroyed water infrastructure and, in some cases, parties to the conflict have deliberately cut off water supplies as a war tactic. Earlier this year, UNICEF reported that water in Aleppo was shut off for 48 days.

Since the beginning of the conflict, families all over Syria have been reporting grave violations against their children — committed by all parties. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has briefed the Council on a regular basis regarding those violations. The United Nations verified 1,500 grave violations in 2015 alone, including killing, maiming, the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. Harrowing as these numbers are, they represent only verified cases. Imagine how many more remain unreported or unconfirmed.

As the violence continues to intensify in Aleppo, children will continue to pay a heavy price. These children ask why their loved ones have died. Mothers and fathers in Aleppo feel helpless as they struggle to feed their children while the prices of food and other commodities have almost doubled, putting children at serious risk of malnutrition. Violence, displacement and roadblocks mean that many children can no longer access life-saving health care. Every checkpoint crossed presents a set of dangers for children: the risk of being exploited, the risk of being recruited or the risk of simply getting caught in the crossfire.

We have all seen the images — brave men and women pulling babies' bodies out from under the rubble; babies taken out of incubators because of attacks on

hospitals; little boys and girls, many injured, pleading for help or dead. Yesterday, many of us saw the girl in the pink coat, standing shocked, terrified and confused amidst the shelling — searching for her father, whom she lost in the chaos of havoc and violence. Children ask us why; we ask why.

This devastating downward spiral must end. Today, every Syrian child under the age of five has known nothing but a lifetime shaped by war. Until recently, over 90 per cent of them attended school, nearly all children were regularly vaccinated and malnutrition was almost non-existent. Syria was among the first Arab countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The protection of children should be, at all times, a primary consideration for all of us. We have failed them over the past six years and we continue to fail the children in Syria. Our failure is not only jeopardizing children's lives, but the future of the country, the region and the whole world.

UNICEF and its partners will continue to do everything we can to provide assistance to children and their families in Syria, wherever they may reside. In that connection, I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, for their tireless support and determination to help us reach those children in need.

Let us be clear — as long as the violence continues, children in Syria will continue to suffer. UNICEF renews its call on all parties to lift the sieges across Syria, and to allow and facilitate immediate, unconditional and sustained humanitarian access to all areas of the country. We call upon the parties to uphold their obligations to protect children. These are their children and their future. They are in their hands. Until the guns are silenced and remain silent, children in Syria will continue to ask us why.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Cappelaere for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): What will it take? Syria is in the midst of a horrific conflict and the worst is probably yet to come. The United Kingdom and France have called this emergency session because eastern Aleppo and other besieged areas are today facing new depths of crisis, as the three briefers have so clearly described. History may show that it is, perhaps, the most horrific conflict of our lifetimes.

We have faced horror before. We and those who have sat in these very chairs before us have collectively adopted 2,321 resolutions — 2,321 decrees from the world's highest authority on international peace and security. We have sent peacekeepers to war zones. We have stemmed conflict. We have defied great odds, bridged divides and have answered the call of humankind for seven consecutive decades. And yet on Syria, sitting here in the Chamber today, after over five years of fighting and the deaths of close to half of a million people, after the displacement of 11 million people from their homes, with 1 million more under siege, the Security Council has completely failed to act. Stephen O'Brien asks why; the answer is simple. Time and again, Russia has vetoed to prevent the Security Council from finding the unity necessary for ending the war. Therefore again I ask, what will it take?

I have met members of Syrian civil society. I have met impartial aid groups, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. I have met doctors who have treated the wounded in makeshift hospitals in Aleppo, and they tell me what is expected: the bombs are directly responsible for the greatest number of deaths. To stop the deaths, stop the bombing. But those numbers are simply the deaths that we can count today. As difficult as it is to imagine, there is even more horror looming under the surface — horror that could be on an even larger scale; an agonizingly slow and painful death.

That is what the United Nations is talking about when it briefs us on the status of besieged areas in Syria. Sieges are now a routine item of discussion when the Council discusses Syria. We cannot begin to think that sieges are now common, that they are somehow a simple matter of fact. They maybe a regular part of the conflict in Syria but they are anything but regular. What they are a deliberate act of starvation and withholding of medical care. The Syrian regime and Russia have been executing a plan that has now laid 1 million people under siege. And "executing" is an all-too-appropriate word because without a change in policy and a change of heart, that is exactly what it is — the slow, painful, bitter execution of 1 million Syrians cut off from aid convoys and the world.

The United Nations has an aid plan. It is not an opposition plan. It is not designed to aid one side over the other. Its sole purpose is to save lives and alleviate suffering. As Stephen said, the aid convoys are ready to roll, but they must have permission from the regime — permission that has been systematically denied. This is the United Nations — the impartial body the world looks to in the bleakest of situations. Russia is a leading member of the United Nations and crucial to the eventual solution of the Syria conflict. Why, then, can Russia and the Syrian regime not sign up to the United Nations aid plan?

First they said it was because of terrorism. Then we reminded them that 100,000 children could not be terrorists. Then they said that it was because of the opposition. The opposition has now agreed to the United Nations plan for eastern Aleppo. What is today's excuse? What is the excuse for employing the medieval tactic of siege? What is the excuse for the continued bombardment — dropping bombs at a disturbing rate over the homes of children and families? What is the excuse for the continued endorsement of war crimes? The ancient city of Aleppo as we know it is on the verge of being wiped from the face of the Earth. Today we speak of reaching those who remain, tomorrow there may not be an Aleppo to reach. If that comes to pass, the excuses of the Syrian regime and of Russia will have played a substantial role. Let me be absolutely clear about what needs to happen in Aleppo.

First, there needs to be an immediate ceasefire in order to give civilians respite from the bombs and to allow humanitarian access. Secondly, like the armed opposition groups have done, Russia and the regime must agree to cooperate on the United Nations four-point humanitarian plan. Thirdly, those civilians who want to leave the city must be allowed to do so safely to areas of their choosing, with protection assured by impartial monitoring. We are receiving reports today of the Syrian regime bombing Syrian families who are fleeing Aleppo on foot with their belongings. I call on Russia and the regime to commit to the Council today that no civilians will be attacked as they leave Aleppo. The deliberate targeting of civilians in such circumstances would be a war crime and we will hold those responsible to account.

Words cannot describe what is currently happening in Aleppo. We have heard talk of a circle of hell, a kill zone, a giant graveyard. Within that kill zone — that circle of hell — are 100,000 children. We have all been discussing it long enough. We have seen the headlines, the images and the videos. Think back to the last face of a Syrian civilian you saw. The gruesome fact is that too many of them are destined to become a statistic — and maybe they already are — another number in the death toll, another figure in a United Nations situation report of people starving in Aleppo, another statistic in a headline that reads "Seven children dead in school bombing". We made a habit of allowing those statistics to be created, and we must break that habit.

Egypt, New Zealand and Spain have drafted a very reasonable draft resolution calling for 10-day ceasefire to stop the bombing and let aid in. There should be a vote on that draft resolution as soon as possible. If not today, then I call on the Council to meet again before the end of this week to review the situation in Aleppo and for us to move swiftly to adopt that draft resolution to deliver a ceasefire and the full implementation of the United Nations humanitarian plan.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Senegalese presidency for having convened today's emergency Security Council meeting on the situation in Aleppo at the request of France and the United Kingdom. I would also like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura; the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien; and UNICEF's Geert Cappelaere for their briefings.

On 15 November, the Al-Assad regime and its supporters launched another ground offensive on Aleppo, which intensified on 26 November. That major ground and air offensive led to the taking of half of the area under the control of the opposition. The toll stands at at least 225 civilian deaths, including 27 children. More than 20,000 people were displaced because of the fighting and more than 200,000 remain under siege. As has been said, the humanitarian situation is simply tragic. The areas that remain under opposition control no longer have operational health infrastructure. Hospitals in eastern Aleppo have been repeatedly bombed without respite. United Nations emergency food reserves have been exhausted for more than 10 days now and access to drinking water is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire population. The ancient city of Aleppo, in which many of the greatest civilizations flourished, is collapsing before our very eyes.

Each of us is aware of the extreme cynicism and brutality that characterizes the Syrian regime's current

offensive in Aleppo, which is a strategy of total warfare. The regime does not hide its objectives. But even war has rules, established, inter alia, by the Geneva Conventions, which apply everywhere and at all times. Those rules embody respect for international humanitarian law, and in particular the protection of civilian populations, by banning belligerents from deliberately targeting areas in which humanitarian workers and civilians are present, carrying out indiscriminate attacks against them, hampering humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations and using famine as a weapon of war. Those basic legal and moral principles have been persistently flouted by the regime and its backers, who have shown themselves prepared to do anything to regain control of the city and break the insurgents' resistance. The civilian population of eastern Aleppo is not even a factor in this implacable, unrelenting equation. Eastern Aleppo is a victim twice over, of constant shelling and a siege that is medieval in its ferocity. In their targeting of civilians, including hospitals and medical personnel, they both constitute war crimes.

During the past week France has continued to hammer home the same message, demanding that the regime and its backers end the offensive and all their indiscriminate attacks and finally allow humanitarian aid access to the people of eastern Aleppo as soon as possible. The priority is providing assistance and protection to the civilian population, whether they wish to leave or stay. Those who want to leave should be able to do so and should be able to choose which direction they wish to take. At the moment they are rightly terrified by the strikes that are killing those who try to flee, the massacres of those who enter areas controlled by the regime and the camps they have been dumped in.

Today we have seen that the Council has once again been unable to agree on a path for saving the people of eastern Aleppo. Every initiative in the Council aimed at saving them — the draft resolution proposed by France and Spain, that of New Zealand and, finally, the humanitarian penholders' initiative — has come up against the same rejection, by Russia. That is why France is once again asking those Council members who are involved in the conflict and have influence on the regime — Russia in particular — to bring all their efforts to bear to interrupt the current spiral, whose legacy will be a devastated country condemned to decades of instability, violence and terrorism. We should emphasize that the current policy of total war is also a strategic error.

Let us not deceive ourselves, the painful tragedy of Aleppo does not represent the road that should be taken if Syria is to ultimately be stabilized in a viable, reconstituted form. No, the tragedy of Aleppo represents yet another stage in Syria's descent into the abyss, at the bottom of which lie its children, blown to bits by bombs or disfigured by hunger, and with the potential for a never-ending conflict of which terrorists will of course be the greatest beneficiaries. The tragedy of Aleppo automatically fuels radicalization and, as a consequence, terrorism. It simply presents the terrorists with a gift of blood and bullets. Sadly, the comparison between eastern Aleppo today and Guernica during the Spanish Civil War is an apt one. Aleppo is at once a vast humanitarian tragedy — the epicentre of the worst such tragedy since the twenty-first century began — a black hole that swallows and destroys every value that the United Nations upholds, and, ultimately, a harbinger of terrible tragedies to come.

For France, which like others has been a victim of terrorism and is still exposed to its threat, Aleppo lies at the core of a challenge that goes to the heart not just of our values but also of our interests, including our security interests. The humanitarian tragedy and the terrorist threat in Aleppo — the horror and the terror — are two sides of the same coin. On behalf of France, I would therefore like to emphasize once again how utterly urgent it is that we end the bombing and the war, protect the civilians and work together to find ways to reach a political settlement, because that is the only possible way out of this conflict. It is in that spirit that on 10 December Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, will hold a ministerial meeting in Paris for those who reject the current strategy of total war and wish to relaunch efforts towards a negotiated solution as soon as possible.

That is the call I am making today on behalf of France. It is a call to action and to urge us to unite around our shared goals, shouldering our responsibilities together. On top of everything else, the credibility of the Security Council is at stake and deeply engaged in the tragedy that is Syria.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Humanitarian agencies cannot get into Aleppo. They are encountering enormous difficulties in getting into many parts of Syria and, quite simply, cannot do their work. That is the clear conclusion that I have drawn today from the briefings by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien

and Mr. Geert Cappelaere. That is why I would also like to thank the United Kingdom and France for calling for today's urgent meeting. Unfortunately, what we have to note in the meeting is a double failure for the Security Council — first, because it has not been able to bring peace and security to Syria, and, secondly, because it has shown itself to be incapable of enforcing international humanitarian law.

The figures are enlightening. The food ran out on 14 November, and we now have 100,000 children in a situation that is beyond desperate. And, simply, that is Syria's future, because it will have to be rebuilt, and it is those children of today who will represent the Syria of tomorrow. All of us, especially the members of the Council, know that Spain, along with New Zealand and Egypt, has been working on the humanitarian issue in Syria, a job for which we take full responsibility and that we are trying to carry out in complete transparency. What we are working on is a plan for achieving a rapprochement of Council members' positions on the issue. It is not a review, it is an exercise in rapprochement. We hope that it will still be possible to reach an agreement.

I would like to conclude by recalling something that might seem obvious but that I believe is fundamental — the total validity of the basic elements of resolution 2254 (2015) and resolution 2268 (2016), on Syria. Once again, these are still valid: access for humanitarian aid, the cessation of hostilities, the separation of opposition groups from terrorists and a renewal of the political dialogue. They are the only viable alternatives for ending the war in Syria.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today to listen once again to an account detailing the suffering of our brother people of Syria under the blows of protracted proxy conflict, against a backdrop of successive failures — not just a failure to reach a final settlement of the crisis, but a failure even to mitigate it. Despite the deep political divisions between the parties with influence in the conflict — which have had an impact on the Security Council performance on the issue, rendering it incapable of producing a result in three previous attempts that sought only to salvage what was salvageable — we have a duty to our brothers and sisters in Syria. Egypt has therefore been working with our fellow penholders, Spain and New Zealand, to reach a minimum consensus on measures that can be taken on the Syria dossier, particularly regarding Aleppo, with a view to alleviating humanitarian suffering. In that regard, we have developed a comprehensive approach in the form of a draft resolution that covers most of the urgent issues as much as possible.

The draft resolution includes principal points, the most important of which is halting attacks by all parties in Aleppo for at least 10 successive days in order to allow immediate and urgent humanitarian access to the inhabitants of the city through full coordination with the United Nations and its partners. It also includes elements related to the necessity of implementing the cessation of hostilities across Syria in accordance with resolution 2268 (2016). It also includes support for instruments to help monitor that implementation. The draft resolution clearly calls for cooperation and coordination to annihilate the pockets of terrorism in Syria and the terrorist groups that control major parts of the Syrian territory. It also clearly calls upon all parties to heed the will of the international community by putting an end to all cooperation and association with all terrorist groups, particularly Jabhat Al-Nusra Front and Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham. That would be at the political or operational level. The draft resolution also reaffirms the pivotal role of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and its two co-Chairs so that the ISSG could work to implement the elements I just mentioned. It calls for the start of serious negotiations between the Syrian parties on a transitional period in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2016) as soon as possible. We, along with our partner penholders, took the utmost care in making the drafting of the draft resolution clear and unambiguous. It includes a reporting mechanism of the Secretary-General on its implementation. It is time for all parties to shoulder their responsibility with respect to the Syrian people.

Despite the clear linkage between the events in Syria, the concept of Arab national security and the national security of Egypt, and in the light of the historic relations that link the Egyptian and Syrian peoples — Egypt and Syria actually used to be one State — Egypt has kept a clean record with respect to its position on the Syrian crisis over the past years. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have neither supported any specific party to the conflict nor engaged in any attempts to exploit the Syrian tragedy. That is in spite of certain political interests. I would like to reaffirm that Egypt will continue down that path. We will not contribute — whether through words, action or inaction — to the destruction of a brotherly Arab

country, regardless of any justification or reason. We will continue to implement a policy towards Syria that does not take anything into consideration apart from Syrian interests and their hopes of a democratic, unified, sovereign and safe State that is free of terrorism and extremism. We will not submit to compromise or political interests. Those are actually the reasons for the daily unprecedented tragedies that have led to the displacement and loss of lives of millions of innocent Syrians.

In conclusion, I would like to call upon everyone — members of the Council, members of the ISSG and other relevant parties that may hold influence — to set their own interests and political grievances aside. We should all genuinely work to resolve this crisis, which has had disastrous effects at the humanitarian, political and security levels.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): New Zealand welcomes today's briefing on the events unfolding in eastern Aleppo. We thank the briefers and commend them and the brave people that have been working with them in such difficult circumstances.

Over the past five years, New Zealand has been highly critical of the Security Council's failure to live up to its responsibilities with regard to the ongoing conflict in Syria. We have not been alone in doing so. For much of that time, the Council has remained largely silent as the country has unravelled and the fighting has become more cruel and more brutal. Often, we have been prevented from acting or even speaking due to the inability or unwillingness of some of the Council's most powerful members to move beyond their own politics and vested interests. That has prevented the Council from putting in place measures that would have saved lives. The people of Syria have paid, and continue to pay, a terrible price for that inaction, and so do their neighbours.

New Zealand has been working with Spain and Egypt to find a way through that impasse. We have sought to cut through the politics and the polemics and focus on agreeing on action that can make a practical difference on the ground. We have tried to work constructively with all key players to that end. The draft resolution that we put forth yesterday is a manifestation of those efforts. Our objectives in putting forth the draft resolution are the same that have guided our engagement on this issue since joining the Council, and the same that led my Prime Minister to convene a high-level meeting on the issue during our September presidency: to reduce the violence, restore the ceasefire, enable humanitarian assistance to reach those most in need and create space for the resumption of political talks on an end to the conflict.

A key focus has necessarily been on seeking to address the grave situation unfolding in Aleppo. Over the past few months, we have seen the presence of a few hundred Al-Nusra Front terrorists in eastern Aleppo used to justify an all-out attack on more than 250,000 civilians. Every hospital in opposition-held areas has been destroyed. No humanitarian assistance has been allowed in since July, despite several pauses in the airstrikes. We have seen indiscriminate attacks on eastern Aleppo that have killed and injured many in western Aleppo. In the past few weeks, it has become clear that the Syrian Government has eschewed efforts to establish a ceasefire and resume political talks in favour of pursuing a military outcome. The result is another humanitarian catastrophe. We urgently need to halt the hostilities in Aleppo in order to get humanitarian assistance to those who so desperately need it. We call on all parties to work in coordination with the United Nations to ensure humanitarian assistance is delivered to those who remain in eastern Aleppo.

We are disappointed that the parties have not yet been able to agree on terms to implement the United Nations four-point plan. We also need urgent action to protect those fleeing eastern Aleppo and assurances regarding the fate of those taken into custody by the Syrian Government. The draft resolution that New Zealand, Egypt and Spain submitted to Council members yesterday seeks to start a process to put the protection of civilians at our highest priority. The text represents the minimum that is required for a credible response from the Council, and we urge all Council members to support it. However, it will mean little unless we see urgent changes in the behaviour of the parties themselves, including some at this table.

Some may argue that our text addresses yesterday's issues and is no longer relevant to the situation on the ground, especially in Aleppo. An immediate ceasefire in Aleppo would undoubtedly address the most pressing humanitarian needs to get desperately needed humanitarian and medical assistance to traumatized civilians and to allow those civilians who want to get out to get out safely to a destination of their choice.

Some may argue that the implementation of our resolution would give aid to the terrorists. We cannot exclude the possibility that terrorist groups may try to use a ceasefire to their advantage, but despite the rhetoric of terrorism that is regularly heaped on this conflict, the conflict between the Syrian Government and its people is not fundamentally about terrorism. Terrorism is an incident of the conflict, not its cause or rationale. In sacrificing the lives of hundreds of civilians and putting hundreds of thousands into misery and suffering cannot be justified by waving the banner of counter-terrorism.

Like Staffan de Mistura, we do not accept that the military advances into Aleppo will lead to the objective towards which the Council has allegedly been working for so many years — a political settlement leading to a stable and unified Syria, living at peace with itself and its neighbours. While our immediate focus must be on saving lives, we urge all parties to the conflict to recommit themselves to a political solution and a return to talks and a pathway towards sustainable peace and national reconciliation.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura, Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their appropriately grim briefings.

Like my British colleague, I would like to respond to the question that Under-Secretary-General O'Brien said is posed to him wherever he goes, whether in Syria or in the region, or when meeting with citizens or politicians. Why cannot the Security Council come together to find a solution? I have to say that we grapple with a lot of really difficult questions. That is not one of them. It is a very straightforward and very unfortunate fact that the Security Council does not come together to answer the cries of the civilians we have heard about again today because Russia, a permanent member, does not want to. That is it. It is very straightforward.

The words we are hearing out of eastern Aleppo now are as dark as any we have heard in our lifetimes. A "death trip" — that is what civilians are calling their journey to flee eastern Aleppo, according to a teacher who as of yesterday had decided to stay there. According to the Red Cross, 20,000 people have fled eastern Aleppo just since Saturday — 20,000 people in four days on a death trip. One fleeing woman was seen pushing a wheelchair with her dead mother in it. She told a reporter, "My mother died of hunger", and said that they had almost nothing to eat for five months.

In another part of the city, amateur footage showed stray body parts scattered among debris where an air strike had reportedly just killed at least 20 people. Survivors wept over the remains. Planes — Syrian Government planes — take brief breaks from bombing runs to blanket eastern Aleppo with leaflets. We have talked about leaflets here before, but one of the leaflets dropped a few days ago reportedly read:

> "Do not be stupid. Think about yourselves and your families. Victory is coming for the Syrian Arab Army. Think quickly because time is passing and it is not on your side."

We all know that time is not on the side of the civilians trapped in eastern Aleppo. The longer the bombing raids go on and the greater their intensity, the higher the odds that they or someone they love will be maimed or killed. But leaving carries extraordinary risks, such as being detained or disappeared by regime soldiers or killed on the death trip itself, where snipers are having a field day, it seems.

I would ask Council members and all citizens of the world to just force themselves to take a break from their day and watch the images from eastern Aleppo — parents cradling their children in agony; civilians on foot mowed down while carrying their suitcases, which lie beside their lifeless bodies. We will likely hear from the representatives of Syria and the Russian Federation today that these images are made up; they are propaganda. That is an argument we have been hearing in the past few meetings.

Now I have to acknowledge that both the Syrian Government and the Russian Government have significant expertise in making things up. They are great authorities in general on propaganda, but we have to recognize that they have an interest in trying to create a post-truth world where all facts are contested and there is no truth but just one person's claim or one country's claim or one party's claim against another. Syria and Russia, as they lie and kill civilians in Syria, count on there being no referee who will adjudicate truths, on the one hand, from lies, falsehoods and fictions, on the other. That is their gamble.

But we have referees. The United Nations briefers we have just heard from are our referees. They have no interest in doing anything other than calling it as

it is. They are independent; they are humanitarians. The carnage is a fact. It is a truth and it is now. The 14,000 terrified civilians, some completely hysterical, who have been driven into Government-held territory under gunfire and air strike attacks are also our referees. Endless numbers of authenticated photos and videos of human-caused slaughter are our referees. There is no denying the truth and the facts, not even in the upside-down land which the perpetrators of this slaughter inhabit.

For months since the siege of eastern Aleppo began, we have met in the Council to demand the basics. We have called for the Al-Assad regime and Russia to allow unfettered humanitarian access to the Syrians in the city and to stop systematically bombing the city's hospitals, schools and markets and the bases of the first responders. Those are appeals that the Security Council should not even have to request — should not ever have to request. The Council should not have to demand compliance with international humanitarian laws or with our prior resolutions, yet here we are urging two States Members of the United Nations, one of which holds a permanent seat on the Council, to abide by those basic standards and to stop ripping up the rule books, which will have effects way beyond Syria for our children and grandchildren.

When it seemed impossible to imagine a more horrific situation, in fact the crisis got worse. The past five days have witnessed one of the most extreme bombardments of civilian areas in the entire life of the conflict, ravaging what was left of the once majestic eastern part of Aleppo. The objective is simple — to take eastern Aleppo by force with no regard for the consequences it may have for innocent civilians. We are all in the broken-record club. We are all broken records on the Council — including those who are actively involved in carrying out the siege of Aleppo — in saying that there is no military solution to this brutal conflict and that the only way out is a political solution.

But that is pablum. The regime and Russia believe the opposite. They are pursuing their approach; they are strategic. They are following a blueprint. They believe in a military solution. The choice they are giving civilians is explicit. It is the same choice they included in a previous leaflet: leave or be annihilated.

For those who choose to leave, the regime and its Russian allies have promised residents of eastern Aleppo passage through so-called safe routes. I am sure we will hear more about these routes today. And if Syrian and Russia propaganda is any predictor, we may hear how civilians upon escaping are embracing regime forces as liberators. Do they really expect us to believe that civilians who have been starved — who have not received a morsel of food since July — have been barrel-bombed, mortared, pick-off by snipers and threatened with annihilation are likely to meet the people responsible for those horrors as their saviours? Is that how it works? Is that how any of us would feel or act?

The reason people are fleeing by the thousands is not because they trust a regime that has killed hundreds of thousands of its own people and systematically tortured tens of thousands more Syrians in its gulags, tagging the bodies of those it kills with serial numbers. No, it is because they know that there is a good chance they will be pulverized if they stay where they are.

As we all know, and as others have argued persuasively here today, Egypt, Spain and New Zealand have presented a draft resolution that would require an immediate halt to military action in Aleppo for a minimum of 10 days. If implemented, this halt would give the civilians of eastern Aleppo a brief break from the relentless bombardment. It would allow some aid to reach people who are surviving by digging through trash for scraps and by eating weeds. It would allow for an orderly departure facilitated by the United Nations. It would also get at least some medicine to doctors who have been compelled to operate on patients without anaesthetic, sometimes in the middle of the street alongside their bombed-out hospitals and clinics. This draft resolution should be brought to a vote without delay, and it should be adopted with the Council's unanimous support. This is a no-brainer. Anyone who says otherwise does not have the survival of Syrian civilians at heart.

But let us also be real. While any pause in the butchery that we are witnessing in eastern Aleppo would be welcome — and we are in favour of it — a brief pause to get a bit of food and medicine in before the savage bombing resumes is not a solution. It is barely even a Band-Aid. It is a sign in some ways of just how low our bar has become.

Russia may again use its veto to prevent the Security Council from offering help to the desperate civilians in eastern Aleppo, as it did in October. If it does so, placing its military aims over the survival of Syrian

men, women and children, Member States must swiftly consider the other tools we can employ at the United Nations, including through the General Assembly, to apply more effective pressure.

Let me conclude. Umm Leen is the mother of seven kids in eastern Aleppo. She has already lost one child during the war — her 12-year-old boy — who was killed when his heart was pierced by shrapnel. In the midst of the siege now, she worries that she will lose more. Her daughter is beset with an awful cough, but there is nowhere to take her since the children's hospital was bombed. But her sickest is her youngest child, a baby she had during the siege, who is now just three months old. The baby has been dogged by serious health problems since he was born prematurely. He is grossly underweight and routinely has difficulty breathing. Without access to baby formula, Umm Leen has taken to feeding him ground-up rice. When parents in Aleppo have a new baby, Umm Leen said,

> "some believe they are making up for the children they have lost. But for me in these conditions I think it is a huge mistake. After I gave birth to him, I felt so sad. Did I give birth to him to see a life like this?"

This is what it is to be a parent in eastern Aleppo, where mother and fathers live in perpetual fear that their children will be taken from them, whether by the flash of a barrel bomb or the slow, gnawing attrition of illness — man-made illness — and starvation. The Security Council must not stand by as more and more children like Umm Leen's hang in the balance. A pause is the absolute least we can do, but we can and must do better than a pause. We must continue to work to end this conflict — and end it not by the devastating military means that the Al-Assad regime and Russia are intent on pursuing, which will only prolong and deepen the suffering we are now witnessing.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): We have recently been witnessing a steady escalation of the situation in some parts of Syria, including Aleppo, with the humanitarian situation there steadily worsening, triggering the international community's widespread concern. China feels for the people who are suffering in Syria and condemns any attack targeting civilians and civilian facilities.

To ease the tension in Aleppo and other areas, the international community should advance its efforts along four tracks in a balanced way. The four tracks are ceasefire, political negotiation, humanitarian assistance and the joint fight against terrorism.

The international community should urge all parties in Syria to end hostilities without delay and work unremittingly to reach an agreement on the relevant issues through peace talks. The international community should continue to step up humanitarian relief to Aleppo. China welcomes the concrete initiatives taken by Russia and the Syrian Government to increase assistance to civilians and hopes that United Nations aid agencies will strengthen coordination with Russia and the Syrian Government to jointly ease the humanitarian situation in Syria, pursuant to the United Nations principles governing humanitarian assistance. Terrorist groups continue to launch attacks in Aleppo and other areas, causing civilian casualties and blocking humanitarian efforts, which calls for greater coordination by the international community to resolutely combat by uniform standards all the terrorist groups designated by the Security Council.

How things transpire and evolve in Aleppo, as a subset of the Syrian issue, is part and parcel of the grand scheme of things pertaining to the question of Syria. A comprehensive solution to de-escalate the situation in Aleppo lies in an effort to remain seized of the big picture in Syria, to hold fast to the prospect of a political settlement as the overarching direction, to maintain the role of the United Nations as the primary player exercising good offices and to continue supporting the work of Special Envoy De Mistura towards the early resumption of the Geneva talks.

Any action taken by the Council on the question of Syria must be truly conducive to de-escalation, to pushing all parties in Syria to an immediate cessation of hostilities in support of, and in cooperation with, United Nations humanitarian efforts, and to facilitating a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process under the good offices of the United Nations, so that a solution that is acceptable to all parties may be reached. The parties should demonstrate their goodwill, meet one another half way, build mutual trust and jointly strive towards achieving a comprehensive, fair and proper solution to the question of Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Rightly or wrongly, humanitarian issues have recently increasingly become a subject for the Security Council's attention. We think that it is now high time to hold a substantive discussion on the Middle East and

North Africa and organize a thematic debate on the topic of the catastrophic consequences of the destruction of the statehood of countries of the region as a result of foreign interference.

The number of victims are in the millions. However, we have heard nothing relevant from those who are guilty for those tragedies. Indeed, the war was launched by the invasion of Iraq spearheaded by the United States and the United Kingdom, and it has effectively been continuing for 13 years. The collapse of a prosperous Libya led to the destabilization of vast swaths of North Africa. Syria was turned into a conflict zone of rivalry for regional leadership, with there being no qualms about using the potential of openly terrorist organizations. Moreover, the humanitarian tragedy that we have heard about today is not considered to be sufficient justification for abandoning that bankrupt policy. Some have sought to hide their failed geopolitical adventures through cynical sanctimony, and even lies, which is something that we often run up against when discussing the subject of Syria in the Security Council; today's meeting has been no exception.

The humanitarian situation in Syria cannot be discussed separately from the other challenges set out in Security Council decisions and by the International Syria Support Group, namely, combating terrorism and seeking political settlement and the establishment of a regime for the cessation of hostilities. In that regard, we see a clear contradiction. It seems that Mr. De Mistura has forgotten that his primary role is to promote the political process. He cannot find it in himself to resume Syrian talks, which were suspended back in May, or to clearly admit why that happened, that is, the complete unwillingness of the opposition to hold serious talks. We hope that in Mr. De Mistura's statement to the Security Council on 8 December we will finally hear something concrete.

We need to acknowledge the failure of the concept of "moderate opposition". It was never convincingly embodied at the political level, and, militarily speaking, the few opposition fighters turned out to be soldiers of the Al-Nusra Front and other extremist groups. It seems there is an attempt to offset the United Nations inertia at the political level with one-upmanship on humanitarian issues: Who can make the grander statement? Who can propose the more dazzling initiative? However, when matters come to a head, those initiatives are either rejected by the opposition, or the United Nations itself is unable to implement them. That fully applies to the situation in eastern Aleppo.

We share the grave concerns about the plight of civilians in eastern Aleppo, but easing their suffering will not come about by halting the counter-terrorist operation. Leaving Syria and Iraq as terrorist caliphates or calling on terrorists to use a humanist approach are also not alternatives. The current situation could have been avoided if the promise given to us at the end of February by the Central Intelligence Agency Director, Mr. Brennan, had been kept, namely, to separate, in the space of two or three weeks, the so-called moderate militants, if any even exist, from the terrorists. That promise was repeatedly renewed, including at the highest level, but still nothing has been done. It is clear that we were being led by the nose the whole time. Either our United States partners and their allies were in actual fact unable, or did not have the resources, to keep their promise, or rather they simply did not want to. Instead, they continued their dangerous attempts to use terrorists as a tool for regime change in Syria.

It comes as no surprise that it was France and the United Kingdom, which have long and blatantly clamoured for regime change in Syria, including providing generous support to militants, that initiated today's meeting — out of their supposed concern for the situation in eastern Aleppo. In fact, the real reason is different. The bandits that they, among others, have so coddled and fuelled are at the point of defeat. Almost half of that part of the city has been liberated. It could be the biggest moral victory of the Syrian army since 2012, when jihadist units were sent to the northern capital and started to gain a foothold, sponsored and armed from abroad.

Today's meeting is a desperate attempt to use the Security Council to save terrorists from destruction in Aleppo. Incidentally, the constant blocking of the proposal to place on the sanctions list of the Security Council such terrorist groups as Ahrar Al-Sham, Jaysh Al-Islam and others has the same aim. It is clear that any help given to militants in Aleppo is categorically support for Al-Nusra terrorists, since it is that group that is on the Security Council sanctions list and that is directing the military operations of all of the illegal armed groups in the neighbourhoods that have been captured.

We vehemently condemn any attempts to protect terrorists, including any political action under a

humanitarian pretext, which, sadly, United Nations humanitarian workers have been dragged into. How else are we to interpret, for example, the fact that the 200,000 residents of besieged Deir ez-Zor, which even by the United Nations analysis makes up a quarter of all besieged Syrians, only receive 1 per cent of the humanitarian assistance? Why has nobody even talked about the fact that the pseudo-humanitarian White Helmets, which were recently nominated for a Nobel Prize, made an incredibly cynical video clip of the rescue operations that they had supposedly carried out, which they posted online? Where is the condemnation of all of those unforgivable fake allegations that we should expect from the supposedly objective, impartial Western media? Why was there no condemnation of that by the United States representative earlier today, who is a professional journalist herself? The standards of United States journalism, and even policy, have now sunk to tabloid level, startling the whole world, and disinformation has become a typical tactic of United States diplomacy.

The fact that humanitarian problems do not seem to genuinely interest Paris, London, Washington or some others is clear from their indifferent attitudes to the suffering of the people in Mosul. Nor does the disastrous humanitarian situation in Yemen seem to bother them either. There over 80 per cent of the population is in need of assistance. As for Aleppo, following the liberation of the northern sector of eastern Aleppo, thousands of people who were being held by militants as human shields have finally had a chance to leave the city to receive food assistance and basic essentials. According to the information we have on those neighbourhoods, 6,500 people have already left, including 2,800 children.

The Russian Federation continues to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the residents of Aleppo. At the instruction of the President of Russia, the Ministry of Defence is sending a special medical unit, which includes a multipurpose hospital with 100 beds and a specialized paediatric therapy department, with a daily capacity for mobile/ambulatory treatment of 420 people. The Ministry of Emergency Situations is also delivering a field hospital with 50 places for stationary treatment, with the possibility of providing ambulatory assistance to 200 patients per day.

We trust that the necessary humanitarian assistance will be provided to civilians who are able to escape their captors by United Nations humanitarian actors, which have focused their particular attention on eastern Aleppo. Incidentally, I was surprised how my United States colleague, who unfortunately left the meeting, argued that the residents of eastern Aleppo were unlikely to move to Government-controlled western Aleppo because the Government was torturing them. However, it seems that she is wrong. United Nations humanitarian workers have repeatedly told us that, in all cases, when Syrian residents come out of a siege, they always end up going to Government-controlled areas. It therefore seems it is the terrorists, not the Government, whom they consider their torturers.

Against that backdrop, we do not understand the wish of the so-called humanitarian troika of the Security Council to force through a non-consensual draft resolution on Aleppo. That will not help anything. Rather, it will see a repeat of the dangerous situation we had on 8 October, when the French delegation tried to put forward a draft text (S/2016/846) that did not have the support of all Council members (see S/PV.7785). Without taking into account our concerns, no draft resolution will be adopted. We have seen such attempts before. Calls for unity in the Council alternate with hopeless draft texts being put forward for vote. It is a pointless tactic.

A key condition for any ceasefire and for providing humanitarian assistance is separating the non-terrorist militants from Al-Nusra. There need to be clear, mandatory, unconditional instructions that terrorists who are on the Security Council's terrorist list should be excluded from any ceasefire regime. We propose to the troika not to be so hasty with votes and, given the current situation, to think about how they could modify their draft resolution to reflect the United Nations humanitarian plan for Aleppo. Overall, Russia supports all impartial international humanitarian efforts and is ready to work in the interest of implementing such efforts. Incidentally, the Castello Road has been fully freed up now and can be used for the passage of transportation carrying humanitarian assistance. Sadly, before, the United States, notwithstanding all its humanitarian rhetoric, refused to stand with our troops to guarantee the Castello Road delivery of humanitarian assistance. But at present we do not need the help of the United States nor the consent of the opposition, so now we hope that the Castello Road will be effectively used by the United Nations.

However, for the plan to succeed, it obviously must first be properly prepared. We need firm guarantees

from militants for the signatures of their commanders that they will not obstruct the passage of humanitarian convoys. Relevant guarantees must also be given by the United Nations itself. It is important to have an advance list of victims and casualties for evacuation and lists of medical personnel for rotation. We need to have an idea of the specific types of humanitarian assistance and arrangements for distribution among those in need. All steps need to be agreed to by the Syrian Government and all groups operating in eastern Aleppo. Otherwise, it will just turn into another propaganda ruse that has no chance of succeeding.

In terms of separating militants, we need to call on them and the so-called local councils to compile lists of Al-Nusra Front terrorists that need to be taken out of the city, and also lists of armed individuals who themselves wish to leave eastern Aleppo. If our Western colleagues are truly concerned about the plight of civilians in eastern Aleppo, and indeed in the whole of Syria, then they need above all to take genuine and practical steps — stop supporting terrorists and lift unilateral sanctions. They need to provide actual help, which Russia is doing, and not try to use sensitive humanitarian problems to advance or achieve their own political goals.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the delegations of the United Kingdom and France for initiating this emergency meeting, and the Senegalese presidency for organizing it. Let me also express thanks to our briefers for their remarkable yet sobering perspectives on the latest developments in Syria.

Emboldened by the military momentum and the full-fledged support it receives from its backers, the Syrian regime shows no mercy and appears to be ready to sink the whole of Syria into bloodshed of a magnitude yet unseen, which is something that we have warned the Security Council about since we joined it 11 months ago.

According to the media and independent sources, just yesterday the Syrian military committed a horrible massacre in the neighbourhood of Bab Al-Nairab, which claimed the lives of 25 civilians, of which most were women and children. They were hit by air strikes while trying to escape eastern Aleppo on foot; they were ordinary civilians, not terrorists. The military operation in Aleppo is not about countering the terrorist threat, but about crushing the opposition to the Syrian regime. It is about gaining ground. The control of territory and the reanimation of the Syrian regime are the primary aims of those who invest military, financial and diplomatic assets and manpower in supporting the lifeline of the brutal dictatorship. But in fact, the only result of the ongoing operation to retake Aleppo will be the strengthening of the terrorist groups inside Syria and throughout the wider region. Al-Qaida will benefit immensely by acquiring much stronger capabilities for recruiting new members in Syria among those wishing to continue resistance against the Al-Assad regime and those who are discouraged by the continuing absence of a political solution. The international campaign to eradicate Da'esh will also suffer a huge blow.

We are further dismayed by the fact that, instead of choosing to go along with the Special Envoy's initiative for Aleppo, the regime forces and its allies are pursuing the path of military offenses and the annihilation of their opponents. In our opinion, that proves one thing — our problem is not a lack of strong and well-thought-out initiatives and resolutions, but rather a lack of commitment, monitoring, accountability and implementation. Aleppo is the bifurcation point of the Syrian conflict. Damascus and its allies are using the current escalation to support their long-term strategy to render the city uninhabitable and to depopulate its opposition-controlled districts.

Reducing Aleppo to ashes and then calling for political talks is not an option, or maybe it is according to the Syrian and Russian military. Al-Assad and Russia have gotten one step closer to turning Aleppo into another Grozny. The world should not sit idly by and let that happen. We call on Russia and the Syrian regime to respect the agreed obligations, including the cessation of hostilities, particularly in Aleppo, and to secure the possibility of providing humanitarian aid to the besieged areas. The world wonders how many more meetings of the Council need to be convened to achieve such a simple and humane goal.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere.

Less than ten days ago, at the monthly briefing here in the Chamber on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.7817), I said that our meetings must not simply be venues for expressing our concern about the devastating circumstances, but rather we must take action and achieve concrete results. Unfortunately,

the Security Council has not achieved concrete results since that time.

Today the briefers described the disastrous results of the escalation of the recent fighting in Aleppo. Japan commends all humanitarian workers for their invaluable, courageous efforts to seek every opportunity to ensure protection and access. But the severe shortage of food rations, health essentials and other lifesaving supplies in eastern Aleppo is posing a grave threat to the population as winter approaches.

We have repeatedly called on the relevant States to exert the strongest possible influence on the fighting parties. We must do absolutely everything possible to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo, so as to protect civilians and medical personnel, undertake urgent medical evacuations and rehabilitate medical services. Japan reiterates its support for the co-penholders — Egypt, New Zealand and Spain — in their efforts to arrive at a draft resolution. We also support the initiative to unify the voice of the international community in the General Assembly. The Security Council must take action and should not be viewed as incapable of responding to a humanitarian crisis of such magnitude.

I heard with keen interest what Special Envoy De Mistura had to say. He affirmed his view that military logic is prevailing on both sides. I agree with the Special Envoy that a stable and durable solution, one that ensures non-recurrence of terrorist threats, cannot be achieved through military means. We must be persistent in seeking a negotiated settlement. Special Envoy De Mistura told us that, when he meets the Council on 8 December, he would like to explain some options that exist. I look forward to listening to him. In the meantime, we must deal with the urgent humanitarian crisis. We must unite to uphold the strategy and take action.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura, Mr. O'Brien of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Mr. Cappelaere of UNICEF for their respective briefings.

Today's briefings once again highlighted the horrifying situation in eastern Aleppo, as the war in the Syria continues to become even more brutal and deadly. Just last week, we listened to Mr. O'Brien urge the Security Council to take action to stop the carnage in eastern Aleppo (see S/PV.7817). Regrettably, our continued failure to converge on efforts to end the suffering of Syrians has led to more intense aerial bombardment and a ferocious ground assault on the besieged area of eastern Aleppo. We remain gravely concerned that the incessant and indiscriminate military offensive against civilians in eastern Aleppo has now forced some 25,000 people to flee their already destroyed homes. It is alarming that, in their attempt to flee for safety, their fate remains uncertain. We are also appalled that the military escalation has killed scores of innocent civilians, many of whom are women and children, and injured thousands more.

The chilling operation in eastern Aleppo in recent days makes a mockery of the Security Council-mandated ceasefire in Aleppo. We echo the sentiment that it is never premature to save lives, and we call on all members of the Council to work towards mandating a ceasefire, even if for a brief period, to allow for a safe and unfettered humanitarian operation. We also urge all parties to the conflict to immediately sign on and agree to the United Nations humanitarian four-point plan for Aleppo.

We have collectively called for a political solution to the Syrian conflict at each and every deliberation by the Council on this issue. It seems that it is one perspective that is shared by all Council members. Yet the military offensive and escalation of violence continues unabated.

The advance of Syrian forces into eastern Aleppo signifies that the fighting in the coming days will only intensify. The carpet bombing of the city only reflects that the pretext of fighting terrorism is no longer valid and the aim now clearly is to gain a military advantage and capture the strategic importance of Aleppo. Even as the fighting in eastern Aleppo is likely to intensify, the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, must not be tolerated. We require no reminder that attacks against schools and hospitals are among the grave violations against children.

We strongly condemn the use of barrel bombs, which the Government previously committed not to use. There can be no justification for the use of barrel bombs in civilian populated areas — an act that reflects blatant disregard for human life.

Powerless children, who account for more than one third of the population of eastern Aleppo, bear the biggest brunt of the violence in the besieged city. Starvation, bombs, burns, the absence of medical care

and sieges are among the many ways that the children of Aleppo are dying. In each report received by the Council, more than half of the casualties are children, thereby raising the question of what we are we going to do about it.

We call upon those countries in and outside of the Council with influence over the Syrian Government to leverage their influence to stop the carnage and resolve this protracted conflict. We have the chance to right the wrong and to stop further suffering. In fact, we have the obligation to ensure that the Council responds to this depressing development. The coming days are crucial, and it is our sincere hope that the long-held silence on the part of the Council on the Syrian conflict will be broken.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Messrs. De Mistura, O'Brien and Cappelaere for their briefings.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses its concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, especially in the city of Aleppo. That is why we value the efforts of the humanitarian agencies, which, at great risk and in situations of all-out conflict, do extraordinary work to help millions of Syrians. We appreciate the fact that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, together with the Syrian Government, has helped thousands of people by providing food, medicine and other necessities in the recently liberated areas. Of special importance is the delivery of food and medicine to Foa'a, Kefraya, Madaya and Zabadani under the four-towns agreements. In that context, we support initiatives aimed at alleviating the humanitarian tragedy in Aleppo. Nevertheless, such proposals need to take into account the nature and scope of terrorism as a destabilizing factor.

Our country has been denouncing the threat of terrorism to peace and stability in Syria and the region for some time now. As Mr. De Mistura said, the existence of terrorism in Aleppo is clear. The Al-Nusra Front, with the support of various armed groups that some have described as moderate, holds more than 200,000 people hostage and unable to leave the area under its control. The Syrian Government therefore has a legitimate right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity against terrorism.

We therefore welcome the fact that areas of eastern Aleppo have been liberated where more than 90,000 people live. It is a paradox that the so-called moderate opposition says that in Aleppo and other parts of the country there are people who, instead of fighting terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups, are preventing civilians from leaving by way of military operations. Since October, they have blocked and rejected a series of humanitarian pauses in eastern Aleppo.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is worsening by the day, as indicated by today's briefers. We therefore hope that we can achieve a minimum level of consensus to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid, without halting the fighting against terrorist groups and their affiliates.

As Mr. Cappelaere mentioned, Syrians, and especially children, are asking "Why?". We also wonder why some members of the international community are continuing to finance non-State armed groups with the single goal of achieving national interests without caring for the suffering of millions of people. That is why it is necessary to end the interventionist and destabilizing policies that deny the Syrian people their right to live in peace as a sovereign and free nation.

Finally, we would reiterate that overcoming the humanitarian crisis is linked to ending the armed conflict. That is why we reaffirm our support to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, in his efforts towards peace aimed at finding a peaceful political solution to the Syrian armed conflict. As tragic as the situation is on the ground, it cannot be an obstacle to the parties negotiating without preconditions. As all members of the Council have said, political solutions are the only way to grapple with the reality. Prolonging the conflict will lead only to greater suffering and destruction.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Mr. De Mistura, Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their briefings and commend their tireless efforts to assist Syria and Syrians in securing a better present and brighter future.

We acknowledge our regret to be involved in this acrimonious debate over the unbearable fate of the Syrian people. Like the briefers and Security Council members who preceded us, we are deeply distressed about the intensified military operations, including ground offensives and aerial bombardments, over the past few days in eastern Aleppo. For almost two years, we have called on all parties to consider the devastating impact of the conflict on the civilian population and to resort to dialogue in order to find appropriate solutions

to the humanitarian and political issues affecting the Syrian population, including Aleppo.

However, the reality is that all sides have, first, chosen the military option and, secondly, intend to continue receiving logistical and military support, including heavy weaponry being supplied to the various opposition groups by international stakeholders, including some prominent members of the Council, while the Government is seemingly determined to regain control of significant rebel-held areas and reinstate the authority of the State in Aleppo and the territorial integrity of the country.

We fully agree as to the need to urgently put in place the means to end the hostilities and to allow humanitarian aid to get through unhindered. The number of civilian casualties and displaced persons is inexcusable, and we strongly condemn all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Against such a backdrop, what are the options? To submit yet another draft resolution, probably to no avail, while civilians continue to die? To call urgent meetings of the Security Council? To issue pious condemnations of the escalating violence while continuing to supply weapons to the rebels of the so-called moderate opposition or to crypto-terrorists? Or to end the irrational policy of "Al-Assad must go", accept the Syrian Government's sovereignty and resolutely pursue ways to bring about a political solution to the crisis?

To conclude, we wish to reiterate our position that we in no way condone violence against the civilian population in Syria or anywhere else. However, we also repudiate the financial and logistical support being provided to non-State armed groups and to rebels who openly cooperate with terrorist groups and who commit grave violations of human rights, including using civilians as human shields. This is the situation prevailing in eastern Aleppo: a civilian population being held hostage by armed groups and terrorists that, if given a chance, will surely flee to another life free from the yoke of extremists and terrorists.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I, too, should like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their tireless work.

Let me be slightly cynical today and say that we have come to this meeting and have heard more of the same, just worse. We are continuing our discussions as bombs continue to rain down on hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure. Staffan de Mistura said, and several of us have taken note of his comments, that the logic of war prevails today on both sides, as both have clearly decided to continue to pursue the military option. What he did not say is that this war is utterly barbaric and does not even respect those incomprehensible things known as the rules of war.

Using this military logic, the strategic importance of Aleppo to both sides has swept everything aside — all human and humanitarian values. When we came to the Council, the primary concerns were the horrors taking place in the medieval cities of the Kefraya, Madaya and Fo'ah. But these fell away from our consideration at the same time as Aleppo started to gain strategic importance, and then we started to consider the horrors of Aleppo, which, at another meeting, we referred to as carnage and a massacre. Today all of those fighting in Aleppo are guided by the barbaric logic of war and are indiscriminately bombing civilian structures, homes, schools and hospitals.

All of them claim to be fighting terrorists. But we see the bodies of children being pulled from the rubble of schools; they presumably were not terrorists. We see the bodies of patients being pulled from the rubble of hospitals; they presumably were not terrorists. We see the bodies of women and elderly people being pulled from the ruins of homes and buildings; they presumably were not terrorists either. But apparently it is widely believed that there are terrorists on all sides. And therefore from east to west, from west to east, from the air or from whatever provenance, the bombs continue to fall and people continue to die.

Some time ago, in this very Chamber, we quoted the lyrics of a song by Bob Dylan, that notable North American poet, in which he asks, "How many deaths will it take until [a man] knows that too many people have died?" There is a very simple formula to stop the massacre: an immediate, unconditional ceasefire. That would put an end to it. We deem the draft resolution that Egypt, New Zealand and Spain have been working on to be a useful instrument and therefore stress that we should give the people of Syria a chance through an immediate, unconditional ceasefire.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Senegal.

Whatever one's point of view on the Syrian conflict, which is entering its sixth year, one image is unavoidable: that of a country ravaged by war; a country

in ruins; a land of fire, blood and tears. The situation there is one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time. The grim toll it is taking is unending. How many orphans, how many widows and widowers, how many elderly people and children have been abandoned to their sad fate without any assistance? How many people have been wounded or maimed for life? How many are now refugees or displaced persons? No one really knows.

What is happening in Syria is untenable. The bombs keep raining down. Meeting after meeting takes place, negotiation after negotiation is held, resolution after resolution is adopted even as human lives continue to be annihilated and homes, markets, schools and hospitals destroyed, in violation of all norms of international humanitarian law. Despite the laudable efforts of humanitarian organizations and good intentions, an entire people is dying and an entire country is crumbling, along with its economy and its centuries-old sociocultural heritage.

How much longer can this go on? Yet the cost of peace is never higher than the cost of war. That is why Senegal hopes that a negotiated solution to the crisis in Syria is still possible.

Those were the sentiments expressed by my President, Mr. Macky Sall, when he addressed the Council on 21 September, in this very Chamber, during the New Zealand presidency (see S/PV.7774). The Senegalese delegation thanks France and the United Kingdom for having taken the initiative to hold this meeting, which once again is providing us with the opportunity to consider the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Senegalese delegation would like to reiterate its call for a cessation of hostilities and in particular for a humanitarian truce so as to allow humanitarian agencies to provide assistance to those who need it, especially in Aleppo. We would also like to recall the obligation incumbent upon all warring parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I would like to pay tribute to members of the medical and humanitarian assistance community, who continue to risk their lives to help the Syrian people in their quest for peace and a somewhat normal life and dignity. My delegation takes this opportunity to call on the various parties to the dispute to allow humanitarian agencies proper access in order to meet the monthly humanitarian targets.

As much a priority as it might be, the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria is but one of the symptoms of the political crisis in Syria. We have entrusted Mr. De Mistura with the task of finding a solution to the crisis. We renew our call to members of the International Syria Support Group, especially its co-Chairs — whom we must name, the United States and the Russian Federation — to redouble their efforts to bring about a cessation of hostilities, which is the sine qua non condition for the provision of humanitarian assistance as well as the main element needed for relaunching the political process. The Council therefore ought to effectively play its due role as guarantor of international peace and security, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, by assuming its full responsibilities given the ongoing situation on the ground.

I would also like to recall the interregional initiative focused on the General Assembly — launched by Canada aimed at addressing the situation in Syria, especially in Aleppo — given the failure of the Security Council, where certain members continue to be mired in disagreement on the topic. That is why my delegation renews its support and encouragement to the three penholders — Spain, Egypt and New Zealand — in their efforts to address the humanitarian dimension of the conflict through the adoption of a draft resolution to put an end to the violence in Aleppo and by breathing new life into a cessation of hostilities throughout the entirety of Syrian territory by effectively implementing resolution 2268 (2016).

In that connection, in addition to contributing to developing practical responses to the disastrous humanitarian situation, we believe that an overarching approach to the question of Syria is more necessary than ever, including political, humanitarian, security and non-proliferation aspects. We should also focus more closely on security concerns, to include non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism, and in particular on countering terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, so that we can get a better and more complete picture of the situation. To that end, I would reiterate our proposal for the holding of a joint briefing to look into all the mechanisms in place with regard to Syria. Whether it is held in public or private, such a briefing should be followed by closed consultations on the various views on Syria, with the aim of gleaning a clear perspective on the emergence, evolution

and the manifold implications — internal, regional and international — of the situation and to move towards finding a political solution, which is the only possible outcome.

The price of peace is never higher than the cost of war. And, as Senegalese President Sall has said, inter-Syrian peace is still possible because war cannot be the destiny of an entire people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to make a brief opening remark before reading out my statement.

We have noted that the invitees to today's meeting, who were asked to give the Security Council an assessment of what is happening in the Syrian city of Aleppo, made their briefings, respectively, from London, Geneva and Amman. Not a single of those United Nations representatives spoke from Syria, which proved an effective practice at the previous meeting (see S/PV.7817), where Ms. Elizabeth Hoff, representative of the World Health Organization, provided the Council with a great deal of information, as members will recall.

That is a very serious shortcoming, as United Nations staff in Damascus were excluded from a Security Council briefing. It is quite peculiar, in fact, and reminds us of another such instance — when three States members of the Council worked on a humanitarian draft resolution without coordinating or consulting with the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is as if here in the Chamber we were recreating surrealistic scenes from the well-known novel by George Orwell *1984*, which members will all be familiar with.

Once again, the representatives and the paymasters of the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated terrorist groups have rushed to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council in an attempt to rescue those terrorists and provide them with moral and political support against the backdrop of the victories by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies as they counter terrorism in Syria: the "moderate" terrorism and the "genetically modified" terrorism.

Before I go into the details of my statement, I would like to reaffirm to the representatives in the Council of Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, who is half-brother to Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, head of the so-called Da'esh, that their continued exploitation of Syrian blood and the suffering of the Syrian people by portraying what is happening in Syria as merely a humanitarian crisis will not deter the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic from discharging its constitutional and legal obligation, supported by our allies, to combat terrorism and save Syrians from the scourge and practices of those groups, in line with the principles of international law and the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, just like any other sovereign State Member of the United Nations.

In that connection, I would like to read out for those who exploit Syrian bloodshed an excerpt from a letter written by Syrian children handed over yesterday to the UNICEF Resident Representative in Damascus. It appears that the representative of UNICEF, who is joining us via video tele-conference, has not heard of this letter, wherein children protest the terrorist attacks that target schools in Aleppo with missiles:

> "We want to go to our schools without fear of car bombs. We want to play without being suddenly shelled or bombarded. We want to live in safety, happiness, joy and peace. The blood of our beloved Syrian children who have been martyred in cities throughout the country will not have been spilled in vain — instead, it will serve as a beacon lighting the way towards an imminent victory over the forces of darkness and terrorism".

Again, that quotation is from a letter sent by the children of Aleppo to UNICEF, which I would like to draw to the attention of Mr. Cappelaere, as he is with us here today.

The representatives of the Al-Nusra Front inside and outside the Security Council will not hear the voices of those children. They will not hear the horrific stories and testimonies of tens of thousands of our people who were saved by the Syrian army and its allies in Aleppo over the past few days, or about the practices of the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated terrorist groups during the past four years. These practices lead to horrific suffering and tragedy, including selling them humanitarian assistance and bread at prices beyond their means. And it does not end with the recruitment of their children, the enslavement of their women, or their use as human shields. Those are all real stories reported by the media 24/7 and have no connection to

the tales from *One Thousand and One Nights* that some like to tell in the Council.

Incidentally, I would like to tell my colleague the representative of the United States of America that Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and all the other terrorist groups that enslave women have issued a price list for women to be sold in the slave market, with prices determined by their age. It seems that, according to that price scale, some of my female colleagues present in the Chamber would, unfortunately, sell for only $40. That is the worth of an enslaved woman — only $40.

The liberation of more than 80,000 inhabitants in Aleppo, including tens of thousands of children, was never part of the plans of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs of France, the United States or the United Kingdom, which have for years claimed that they were defending those civilians. The call by their Governments to impose sanctions on Russia and Syria, after we had liberated our Syrian civilians, proves once again that those Syrians were exploited by those who sponsor terrorism, in order to protect the terrorists of all stripes and to practice cheap political blackmail. Today hundreds of civilians who had sought to move from eastern to western Aleppo, in an attempt to flee terrorist-held areas for those protected by the Syrian army, were killed by the moderate or genetically modified terrorists who are loved by the delegations of the United Kingdom, France and the United States.

There is an elephant in the room that no one wishes to acknowledge. As Mr. De Mistura and Mr. O'Brien stated, non-State armed groups — they did not say terrorists but used the expression "non-State armed groups" — have prevented the civilians in eastern Aleppo from leaving. This means that those terrorist groups are using civilians as human shields.

The farce staged by some in the Council today through misleading statements, in line with the positions of their extortive Governments and their destructive practices, will not eclipse the sunlight or the fact that our people in certain neighbourhoods of Aleppo have regained hope and the promise of life following their liberation by the Syrian army and its allies, which have provided them with all the necessary means to live decently, including shelter, food and medicine, and they thereby now enjoying safety and stability after having suffered for more than four years.

The protagonists of this theatre of the absurd who represent the Al-Nusra Front inside the Council failed in denigrating the military achievement of the liberation of civilians in Aleppo from terrorism. They also failed in denigrating the image of the humanitarian and relief efforts on behalf of those freed from the grip of terrorism, as carried out by the Syrian Government in cooperation with its allies as friends. In that regard, I note that the Government of Syria today requested that the Office of the Resident Representative of the United Nations in Damascus — as Mr. De Mistura and Mr. O'Brien are well aware — contribute to the Government relief effort to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of Syrians in Aleppo, and to use the stocks contained in United Nations warehouses in Aleppo and any other assistance that would help meet the basic needs of our citizens. I would like to add that the Resident Representative will actually go to Aleppo because the Syrian Government has approved his visit there, which is scheduled for tomorrow, Thursday. We will then see what the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs can do.

I commend the efforts and achievements of the friendly Russian delegation, which has supported Syria not only in the war against terror, but in connection with various aspects of humanitarian and relief work. The latest instance was when President Vladimir Putin instructed the Russian Ministries of Defence and Emergency Situations to send mobile hospitals to provide medical assistance to the residents of Aleppo and surrounding areas. I emphasize that those are real field hospitals, and not mere studios producing fictitious stories of the so-called white-helmeted heroes founded by British intelligence James Le Mesurier, who is apparently of French ancestry, the same nationality as the person who called for this meeting.

It is time for the curtain to fall on this theatre of the absurd, which has led to the unprecedented spread of terrorism and a state of panic in world public opinion, as this terror has reached every part of the globe. These States need to realize that terrorism cannot be used as a tool to turn Aleppo into another Kandahar. That will not happen, not even in their wildest dreams — or nightmares.

It is unfortunate that the realm of such trivial political practice is not limited to the Governments of the States Members of the United Nations, but actually includes some senior Secretariat officials who have described the fate of the tens of thousands of civilians saved by the Syrian army and its allies from the grip of terrorism as being unknown and their safety undetermined. It is

as though they are hastening to support the terrorists and sending one message after another: "Continue with your moderate terrorism, and we will whitewash your record in the Security Council".

It has become a dangerous fait accompli that some in the Security Council have shirked their responsibilities to combat terrorism and maintain international peace and security, and have turned the Council into a theatre for political extortion and polarization, as it tackles the terrorist war against Syria, to the point where those States have actually obstructed the inclusion of terrorist groups in the Council's lists of such groups. As the Council knows, the latest example of that was the refusal by the United States, France and Britain to include Jaysh-e-Mohammed and Ahrar Al-Sham on those lists.

They have also shirked their responsibility for the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2253 (2015). They look the other way when other countries support terrorist groups by providing them with unlimited media exposure and financial and logistical support, in addition to takfiri Wahhabi jihadi fatwas and opening up borders to foreign terrorist fighters and weapons. All this is provided by the Al-Saud regime, the godfather of global terrorism; by the regime of Erdoğan — who is under the illusion that he is the sultan of his time — which is the real sponsor of the global "Muslim brotherhood" organization; and by the Al-Thani regime in Qatar, the main financier and sponsor of the Al-Nusra Front, whose Minister for Foreign Affairs confirmed two days ago, in a statement to Reuters, that its sheikhdom would continue to provide support for, and arms to, the terrorists in Syria even if the incoming United States Administration were to cut off its support. I conclude, obviously, with the regime of Hasaballah XIV. I will give a prize to anyone who knows who that is.

This is also in keeping with Israel's destructive role, as it provides support to terrorist organizations in the area of separation and the environs of the city of Dara'a, in particular the terrorist Al-Nusra Front. In that regard, I would like to refer to the Israeli aggression that took place last night, which was not mentioned by any of the briefers today. There was an Israeli attack late last night on Al-Sabboura in western rural Damascus. Israeli war planes fired two missiles from Lebanese airspace — a desperate attempt by the Israeli occupation to raise the morale of takfiri terrorist organizations, which are collapsing following heavy losses in many areas, in particular in the western rural areas of Damascus.

In conclusion, I again call on the fainthearted in the Security Council who continue to sympathize with the genetically modified moderate terrorists to take back the barbaric garbage that they have exported to us over the past five years. If they want them, they should care for them by setting up self-governing areas in their own cities in Europe, America and elsewhere. Take them if you want them. Take the Al-Nusra Front. Take its members. Give them entry visas and residency permits. They would be good terrorists in their countries.

My Government remains committed to its policy of balancing the priority of fighting terrorism, as the main threat to security and stability throughout Syria, on the one hand, and the pursuit of a Syrian-led political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue, without any intervention or preconditions. Hence, the Syrian Government is still waiting for an invitation from Mr. De Mistura to resume the Syrian dialogue that he suspended in May.

The President (*spoke in French*): Before adjourning this meeting, as the Senegalese presidency of the Security Council comes to an end, I would like to correct a mistake. Earlier in the meeting I failed to thank, congratulate and encourage our briefers from this morning: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. Their testimony and presentations shed clear light on our work.

I am moreover particularly pleased to express the deep gratitude of the Senegalese delegation for the kind cooperation that the members of the Security Council — the permanent members and their teams — have all contributed throughout the month of November in carrying out a particularly busy programme of work. In their support, I see the expression of their ongoing commitment to peace and security around the world and the excellent relations that unite each of their countries with my own.

I would like to thank all the members of the Secretariat, starting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself, the skilled technical and administrative staff of conference services, the interpreters, as well as the representatives, special envoys and security officers. I

thank in particular Ms. Hasmik Egian and the entire Security Council Affairs management team, whose professionalism and availability were exemplary from all points of view.

I must also offer my gratitude to our partners in the press, generally speaking, as well as those who are accredited to the United Nations, and more specifically to our friends at the stakeout.

As this month comes to an end, we can be pleased to have been able to bring about consensus around a number of significant issues that we have been seized of. We would not have been able to achieve that alone or without the commitment, support and agreement of every Council member. As our presidency wraps up, I know that all members would like, together with me, to wish every success to the delegation of Spain, which will assume the presidency in December.

The meeting rose at 2.15 p.m.